A MEMOIR OF
LIEUTENANT RAYMOND REID

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Raymond Wilson Reid

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By

Thomas H. Spence

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Issued in tribute to a courageous nephew by
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and the Author.

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FOREWORD

Life need not be long for much living.

Into less than twenty-two years may be crowded the seasons of childhood and the days of youth, a year and a half at college, visits to many of the larger cities of the United States, a week-end as fellow guest with a famous bull-fighter in Mexico City, a summer in Hollywood, training as an army flier in six different states, the piloting of a plane across the Atlantic by the Arctic route, further combat instruction in England and North Ireland, sixty-one missions and participation in four major battles as bomber pilot, to be consummated by death on the heights in the closing movement of a struggle for freedom which convulsed the reaches of the air as well as land and sea.

This is possible, for it has been done. It was done by him whose career is sketched in these pages.

No 46 Life of Br. Thomas H. Spence Jr.

A MEMOIR OF LIEUTENANT RAYMOND REID

Raymond Wilson Reid was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1923. His parents, Coy Raymond and Helen Spence Reid, were recent residents of that city, having come from the Presbyterian congregation of Rocky River, in Cabarrus County, near Concord, North Carolina. In Knoxville the family was affiliated with the Little Brick Church, of which Rev. Cecil Lang was pastor; and it was here that Raymond first came into contact with Presbyterianism in its organized form, when, as a child, he attended the Little Brick Sunday School.

In 1927 the Reids returned to North Carolina and made their home in Thomasville. Two daughters were born after this removal, Helen Anne in 1928, and Mary Elizabeth, eight years later. Raymond began his education in the Thomasville schools. During summer vacations he was a frequent visitor in the homes of his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Mack Daniel Reid and Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Hugh Spence, in a community some sixty miles to the south, and a familiar attendant at Rocky River Church, in which one of his grandfathers served as deacon, and of which the other was pastor for fifteen years.

The sports of boyhood gained a proportionate

share of his attention, and, somehow, the compelling recollection of him at first base on a neighborhood baseball team suggests that the sandlots of America must henceforth be reckoned with the playing fields of Eton in the winning of Waterloos. With Rev. S. S. Wiley, pastor of the Thomasville Presbyterian Church, he occasionally went on short camping trips, of which the most memorable was taken in the middle of winter. This overnight excursion into the mountains to the north of Thomasville proved of more than slightly hazardous nature due to the unusual cold and snow-covered roads which were encountered.

FAITH AND WORKS

Having been presented to the Lord in baptism in his early years, Raymond made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as his Saviour and united with the Thomasville Church at the age of eight years, under the pastorate of Rev. J. K. Fleming. He was an active participant in the work of the Sunday School and Young People's department, and regular in his attendance upon the services of worship of the church. During one summer he spent some time at the Pioneer Conference conducted by Winston-Salem Presbytery at Glade Valley, North Carolina.

An intimate commentary is found in a letter

written by his closest friend, Midshipman, now Ensign Charles Lambeth, upon intimation of Raymond's death:

> "He was the truest friend anyone could ever have. In all the time I knew him Raymond was always a gentleman in every way. I think I noticed this especially because he was so gentle when he played with Mary and the other children and he was so courteous to older people."

In his final letter is found the statement, "We have the sides of the tent rolled up so the sun can come in" — that had become a habit with him, arranging for the sun to come in, that the lives of others might be the brighter.

DAYS OF PREPARATION

His interest in aviation was early and unremitting. "Raymond's first love was always airplanes," wrote one who knew him well. He constructed more than the usual number of models and studied pictures of various types of aircraft, while even the themes submitted in his English classes were not immune to the influence of this absorbing concern. The sky gripped him with a hold that was never relaxed. His impatience to get into flight is nowhere better illustrated than by an incident at the beginning of a combat mission when he

taxied with such speed that a bomb was thrown through the side of a parked plane, thus incurring the displeasure of the commanding officer to the extent of being ordered to ride as co-pilot on the two succeeding trips.

If the sky was his great love, the sea was not without claims upon his affection, and for several years he held membership in a sea scout troop at Thomasville. As a member of a group of scouts he visited the New York Fair in 1939, and did part-time work at one of the exposition buildings.

Though without the means generally deemed necessary for extensive travel, he was acquainted with much of the country in which he lived and for which he was destined to give his life. During the summer of 1941, he planned a trip to Mexico City. Encountering a group of college professors, who were driving by car to the same point, he accompanied them as chauffeur. While examining an organ in a church of that capital city, he was approached by a Mexican who had studied in the United States. The latter proved to be a citizen of substance and evidently of hospitable disposition, for he invited Raymond to spend the week-end at his home. Here he found that a renowned bull-fighter was also a guest of his host.

Upon graduating from Thomasville High School in the spring of 1941, he had enrolled at

North Carolina State College, located at Raleigh, and he entered this institution in the fall of the same year. It was here, as a member of the Reserve Officers Training Corps, that he was first brought into contact with military life.

In the summer of 1942, he set out with a college friend, Harry Snavely, for California. Transportation for the last two thousand miles of this trip was secured by an ordinary expedient with extraordinary results. Upon soliciting a ride from the owner of a west-bound car, the boys discovered that he was the sole occupant and that the rear seat could be converted into a bed. By driving in relays, the three were enabled to proceed with a minimum of delay either by day or night. While in California, the two students lived in Hollywood, with Harry's uncle, and worked at the Vega plant in Burbank. It was here that Raymond became thoroughly acquainted with the craft which he loved and in which he was to carry on right nobly his part in the combat for freedom.

With the approach of the school year, he consulted his parents by letter in regard to returning to State College. Upon receiving a reply that he was to use his judgment in the matter, he left the Pacific coast and reached Raleigh by way of the Northwest and Chicago. But there was an attraction for many young Americans more alluring

than that of academic halls, and he enlisted in the Army Air Corps in November, 1942, to be called for service in February of 1943.

Having reported at Miami, Florida, he remained there for a short time and then was assigned to Cumberland University, Lebanon, Tennessee, for instruction. Upon conclusion of this course, he qualified for further work as navigator, pilot, and bombardier; and, in his own words, "chose pilot, naturally." Maxwell Field, Alabama, was the next point of training. The mingled lights and shadows of a cadet's career are typified by the contrasting comments, "This morning my flying was terrible" and "I made an average of 96 for the week so I get open post Wed. Fri. Sat. and Sunday." Here he characterized a fractured ankle as of minor consequence and optimistically predicted, "in a few days I'll be entirely well."

South Carolina was the location of the next two stations. After a time at Camden, which he described as "just about perfect," he was transferred to Sumter. His average for the work here was 94, while 96.28 was the highest mark of any member of his contingent. At Freeman Field, Seymour, Indiana, he was awarded his commission as second lieutenant in February, 1944. Further training was received at Shreveport, Louisiana, and at Lake Charles in the same state. At times the

spirit of adventure predominated over sounder judgment, for, at the latter place, he was warned against "leading 16 ships thru the clouds at 230 M. P. H." From Lake Charles he moved to Savannah, Georgia.

HIGH TIDE

On June 14, he pointed his plane to the North and East for flight across the Atlantic by way of Canada, Greenland, and Iceland, to England.

For a time he appears to have been quartered at Oxford University. Then came a period of special intensive training in combat crew tactics at a B-26 Marauder base in North Ireland, where, in the little churchyard at Broughshane, the parents of his maternal grandfather had long since been laid to rest. A bicycle was secured and a "lot of time" devoted to riding over the roads traversing the green hills and well-watered valleys of Ulster, in company with Eugene Hogwood, a fellow flier. A visit to Belfast was made on one such trip. The "first bad thing that happened" occurred when someone stole his electric razor. But the time was near for testing by encounter with the foe, so it was once more to England, and then across the Channel where a war awaited the winning.

By the 22nd of September he could write, "I know Paris pretty well so we don't have to waste

time reading maps." The same letter spoke in appreciation of the hotel facilities there which were at the disposal of service men. This evoked a perhaps unconscious contrast with life in the field, "We live in tents, but it's not too bad, sorta muddy."

Persistently adventurous, he wrote of himself, a friend, and the newly arrived P-38's, "We are pretty important now as the rest of the pilots are afraid to fly them without instruction," and added that these planes gave the thrill of a first solo flight. But he was not altogether unmindful of earth, for he and a companion, designated as Barr, built a little vehicle from parts of German aircraft which was capable of speeds up to thirty miles per hour. This car was probably without a top, since it was described as "lots of fun" except when it rained. About this time the explosion of a bomb from the lead ship in the formation tore a hole in Raymond's plane, but none of the crew was injured. "We have been flying at night," he reported, and was wondering who had the plane he had piloted across the Atlantic.

The particular assignment of his Tiger Stripe B-26 Marauder group was that of tactical bombing, with a view to disrupting and disorganizing commercial networks, road junctions, railway yards, bridges, and ammunition dumps. On the

14th of February, 1945, Lieutenant Reid successfully consummated a mission directed against a railway bridge at Engers, Germany, in spite of a faltering left engine and in the face of what was described by the War Department as "intense and accurate anti-aircraft fire." Two days later he was instrumental in the destruction of a vital rail junction near Rees on the Rhine. The flights of this month were broken by a week's rest in London, and that city proved a welcome sight.

The Distinguished Flying Cross was subsequently conferred upon Raymond in recognition of the episode at Engers, this decoration being added to the Air Medal, with ten oak-leaf clusters, and four major battle stars.

GREATER LOVE

While still in the United States he had written, "I have a swell crew and want to do all I can for them." This desire was effectively realized on April 16, 1945. In the course of his sixty-first mission, the second of that day, his right engine failed after crossing the Rhine. Being forced to abandon the formation, the ship was turned toward neutral Switzerland. Enemy ground fire caused further difficulty, and fifteen miles short of the Swiss frontier, Lieutenant Reid gave orders to abandon the plane. "Without a doubt," said the co-pilot, Lieutenant Kenneth Stear, "if it had

not been for his quick thinking and superior ability as a pilot, we would all have been killed." Raymond remained at the controls long enough for every other member of the crew to jump from the plane. This proved to be too long to permit his own escape.

And thus he died, having seen the glow of sunrise in the east sky and heard the trumpets of triumph from beyond the great horizon. The plaque on the base of the flagstaff in the United States military cemetery at Muensingen, Switzerland, where he lies buried, carries the inscription:

ENSHRINED FOREVER
IN THE HEARTS
OF THEIR COUNTRYMEN
HERE LIE OUR GALLANT DEAD
COMRADES IN ARMS
U S A A F

And the Bernese Alps rise silently in the background.

FREEDOM'S HOLY LIGHT

Church bells in the hill country of Tennessee and Piedmont North Carolina still send forth their call to the house of the Lord. There those who will may worship with none to hinder or restrain. Many who have contributed toward the continuance of these blessings will again join in such assemblages. Others have passed beyond

the realm of morning prayer and twilight song, but their heritors are enabled to praise God in untrammeled manner because of the steadfastness of those who loved freedom more than what men call life, and faltered not at the cost of conquest in the name of liberty and righteousness.

In years to come students will gather at North Carolina State College, when the leaves begin to turn and the first frost falls as precursor of approaching autumn, where they may freely learn those things which pertain to free men. Such a privilege has not been easily acquired, and will not always be easily preserved. But, by the grace of God, it will be preserved so long as the youth of this land are moved by that devotion exhibited by those from whom we are separated for a season, whose lives are not to be measured by the sum of their earthly years, whose virtue is that they lived gloriously and, having lived, transmitted to others an heroic heritage.

Raymond has passed from the scene of earthly activity, but his works indeed do follow him, as is true of all the goodly company of his gallant comrades; for men continue to live in that freedom which was so dearly bought by those who no longer walk among us. And so, for the present, it is Goodbye; but only until the break of that blessed morning in the fairest of lands.